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ABSTRACT

A detailed description of a three-year project investigating the kinds of writing produced by Australian students in grades 10 through 12 is provided in this report. The various sections of the report describe the aims, objectives, and rationale for the project; some of its major assumptions and influences; a description of the student and teacher samples and their schools; a discussion of "interventions" by the researchers; the methodology employed; and the findings to date. (AEA)

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THE PROCESS OF WRITING AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF WRITING ABILITIES, 15 to 18: AUSTRALIAN RESEARCH IN PROGRESS.

Bruce Bennett.

ED174984

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INTRODUCTION

The pilot research project which I am about to describe has entered its third and final year at the University of Western Australia. It is a project that has been funded by the Education Research and Development Committee, a federal government agency, and this has enabled us to employ a full-time Research Officer. That appointment was a crucial one and we are fortunate in the person chosen, Adrienne Walker, who was a teacher of students of the age range under investigation at the time of her appointment and who had also worked in the Curriculum Branch of the State Education Department. Mrs. Walker has been the major force in establishing and maintaining good relations with teachers and students in the participating schools - an essential aspect of this kind of continuing research - and also in building confidence and co-operation among the eight members of the research 'team', which meets each week to discuss and plan aspects of the work. The team, incidentally, is a unique example of co-operative activity between staff members of the two universities in Western Australia, the University of Western Australia and Murdoch University, whose ideological and other differences have been stressed by critics to the detriment of their potential for co-operative work (there may be similarities here with Carleton and Ottawa universities). Three members of the School of Education at Murdoch University have taken an active part in this research (one is Simon McPhail, who was unable to attend this conference, but whose analysis of two case studies I hope to present later). The team also contains high school teachers, and members

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of the University of Western Australia. I would like to discuss some of the dynamics and difficulties of team research of this kind based in a traditional university English department a little later, but should first state the aims and objectives of this research.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of the research are:

1. to describe the kinds of writing that go on in the senior years of Western Australian high schools (years 10-12) and their place in the curriculum;
2. to describe changes in students' writing over a three-year period;
3. to relate changes in students' writing to a variety of personal and contextual features which may influence it.

An underlying and more general aim is to contribute to knowledge and understanding of the writing process.

A PROPER ENGLISH DEPARTMENT ACTIVITY?

This is not the kind of research that might be expected in a university department of English literature in Australia, though it would probably be quite acceptable in North America. Ours is a fairly large department of about 30 full-time teaching members of staff, in which the prevailing view is the Leavis-ite assumption that we are primarily engaged in 'making available to our students the great works of English literature.'

Although institutional support has been given to this research in terms of office space, occasional typing assistance etc., I was recently called on to justify the place of this research in a university English department. I did so in something like the following terms:

What we are engaged in when we teach English literature is contributing to our students' formulation of critical approaches to literature and, possibly, to life. What the students learn, and how they learn in this situation, will be intimately related to their own attitudes to

writing and the process of writing. Investigating the writing products in relation to the processes and situations that produced them could contribute to a wider understanding of the dynamics of that activity which we claim to be interested in. In relation to students' writing in particular, we (and they) might gain further understanding of its potential for learning and the barriers to growth and development in that area. In relation to the tertiary study of literature, such work as this might lead to a stronger sense of literary works as human artefacts that have gone through stages of composition: the facsimile manuscript of *Sons and Lovers* or the drafts of *The Waste Land* might gain enhanced meaning as stages towards what we know as the final compositions.

Research of this kind bears a special relationship to the study of Australian literature, which I also teach: it is possible to meet writers, to discuss their compositions with them, to become involved at close quarters in the creative acts of people in the students' own communities instead of relying solely on the finished products of dead writers twelve thousand miles away. I don't want to be interpreted here as disparaging in any way the recognised masterpieces of English literature, many of which I also enjoy and consider enormously important in a full literary education. But it seems to me that a more creative, and in the end a more critical and responsible understanding of literature is most likely to emerge if we take steps to de-mystify the process of writing: instead of inculcating a sense of reverence for the immaculate conception and unsullied birth of a work of literature, to know that its process of composition may have some kinship with our own struggling efforts. To know that Hemingway re-wrote the ending of *A Farewell to Arms* 39 times, and still possibly didn't get it right, may be a big encouragement to many of us - and especially to the many students who seem to think that works of literature write, or type, themselves.

In presenting some of these connections between literature - the subject of study - and students' writing (both literary and utilitarian), I was challenging two articles of faith: Firstly, that the university teacher's responsibility to literature begins and ends with the product - the text; and secondly, that the university teacher has no responsibility for his students' writing beyond pointing out where, and in what ways, it falls short of acceptable literary critical standards. This kind of research would, I hope, widen the university English department's conception of its role towards a more dynamic view of literary composition and towards a greater understanding of the sources and causes of growth in students' writing.

SOME ASSUMPTIONS AND INFLUENCES

One major assumption which affects the whole project is that educational research carried out by a *team* of investigators is both more difficult, and more rewarding, than individual research. Difficulties, of course, emerge in attempts to conflate or summarise a variety of quite individual points of view, perceptions and judgements. Hence traditional educational research has often preferred a narrower "objectivity" with the result that much of it has been impeccable, but of questionable value. A team working on a broad-based project like this may produce new insights and generate new hypotheses as it proceeds: it may therefore give a more complete picture than would otherwise be achieved. If "truthfulness" is what we are concerned with (and this must be a more comprehensive notion than "reliability" and "validity" as traditionally defined) the questions to be asked must be penetrating and unblinkered. A team approach is more likely to generate a variety of questions, but it must also provide the means to answer them. Our weekly meetings since 1977 have generated many questions - and some ways of finding answers to them.

The research models that appeal most, and which are shaping our work, are those described as "anthropological" rather than "interactionist".[1]

The anthropological approach starts by accepting a broadly based situation and refuses to oversimplify by eliminating, manipulating or controlling variables in order to prove a point. But educational research of the anthropological kind does not claim to account for every aspect of the total scene in its analysis. Rather, it accepts that a reduction in the breadth of the inquiry is necessary to give closer attention to the emerging issues ('progressive focussing'). Also by contrast with interaction analysis, which often assumes a synchronic rather than diachronic and developing situation, the anthropological approach guards against categorising or analysing too early; hence results are less likely to be circumscribed in advance. Its hazards are obvious: it may appear "messy" to the tidy-minded and there is always a danger of data spilling over the categories we define, becoming ungovernable - like life itself, one is tempted to add. (We have been almost engulfed by some of the spillovers.) But once this general approach is adopted, the methods to be used can be eclectic and flexible, and encompass various instruments of measurement and evaluation.

The main and obvious influence on our work has been the Schools Council research carried out at the London University Institute of Education and described in Britton et al., *The Development of Writing Abilities, 11 to 18.*[2] The presence of Nancy Martin at meetings of the team between February and June 1977 strengthened this influence but also helped us to establish certain areas of difference. In particular, our work was designed to concentrate on the upper end of the secondary school age range as it applied to West Australians, and we were determined to give appropriate attention to intensive case studies of a limited number of students and their writing. Here we were influenced by Janet Emig,[3] whose data is drawn chiefly from "writing autobiographies" of eight twelfth grade American students (her "autobiographies" are composed mainly of transcripts of interviews and students "composing aloud" as they write). Another influence is the work of Charles Cooper and

Lee Odell,[4] which examines the writing processes of eight competent adult writers by the method of scrutinising revisions and reasons for these revisions in their writing. (We have taken this notion of 'revision' further in some cases by discussing with students their reactions to writing done in earlier years and how they would re-write it in the present. We were concerned here, as elsewhere, to report wherever possible in the human voices, human responses of students and teachers. This would be 'person-centred' research.)

Recent work by Donald Graves[5] has concentrated on the close observation and analysis of the writing processes of groups of seven-year-old children. In the conclusion to his study, Graves comments on the directions that future research into writing ought to follow:

> *In order to improve both procedures and study scope, future research in writing should continue to explore the feasibility of the case study method. Further studies are needed to investigage the developmental histories of different types of children in relation to writing and the writing process. In a profession where there is a basic commitment to the teaching and understanding of the individual child, it is ironic that research devoted to the full study of single individuals is so rare.*

This is an important insight. Our approach attempts to combine surveys and case studies in order to do justice to individual experience *and* to the communities of which each individual is a part. In keeping with our "anthropological" emphasis, we are concerned to take account of several sets of perceptions of the writing process - those of students, teachers, parents and investigators. It is assumed that none of these people has sole access to knowledge about writing, but all may contribute to a more complete picture.

THE SAMPLE

Students and teachers from four senior high schools are taking part in the project. The first participating school is a small senior government high school (enrolment 320) in a country town: its intake includes children of farmers, of aboriginals living on a government reserve, of crayfishermen living in a nearby settlement and of people in various kinds of employment

in the town. Its retention rate of students from their first year of high school (year 8) into year 10 was 90%, into year 11 was 58% and into year 12 was 32%. The second participating school is a senior government high school (enrolment 706) in a recently developed, affluent coastal suburb, where parents are often in professional or managerial positions. Its retention rate into year 10 was 99%, year 11 was 70% and year 12 was 55%. The third is a large senior government high school (enrolment 1090) which was classified as "disadvantaged" by the Schools Commission: many parents are first generation migrants in semi-skilled or unskilled positions and the school's retention rate was lower than the country school, being 84% into year 10, 30% into year 11 and 30% into year 12. The fourth school is an independent non-Catholic church school for boys in a long-settled suburb. Students are generally sons of affluent parents from urban and rural areas. Its total enrolment in 1977 was 610 and its retention rate of year 8 boys into year 10 (including newcomers) was 107%, into year 11 was 93% and into year 12 was 93%.

The total size of the sample for survey purposes in 1977 was 584 students from years 10, 11 and 12 in the four schools, chosen to represent both sexes and a range of abilities. Students selected for closer observation are termed "case studies" and form a sub-group of the survey sample. There were 60 of these students in 1977, but they have reduced to 16 by 1979 as groups of students leave school each year. The majority were selected to represent a range of ability (high, medium and low according to teachers' assessments) whereas others were selected according to the following special criteria:

(a) tendency to read widely;
(b) ability to speak more easily than write;
(c) positive attitude to writing;
(d) negative attitude to writing.

An attempt was made in this sample also to represent a range of home backgrounds from "supportive" to "non-supportive" as assessed by teachers.

Case study students were selected by the research team on the basis of information from at least four subject teachers in each case.

"INTERVENTIONS"

'Interventions' are those occasions on which the investigators intervene in the school programme and set a special task or tasks for members of the sample groups. One such intervention has been to set a similar writing task for all students in the sample each year. Thus, in 1977, 1978 and 1979 we have asked students to write an open response to different newspaper photographs, chosen for their supposed interest and relevance and the probability that they would stimulate a wide range of different kinds of response - imaginative, descriptive and informative. (The photograph in 1977 was of a child with his mother, being sent off for his first day at school; the second photograph in 1978 showed a man facing a roaring bushfire; the third, in 1979, showed city people reacting to a rain-shower in different ways.) These scripts are providing a basis for analysis of group differences and changes in the writing of individuals between year 10 and year 12 (ages 15 to 17). Tentative hypotheses at this stage include the suggestion that changes occur in groups and individuals from a preference for certain kinds of writing (e.g. narrative) towards other kinds (e.g. essay), from an involved point of view towards a more detached point of view, from more simple to more complex syntactic forms, from relatively metaphoric to relatively literal writing, (this is disputed by some members of the team), from a lesser towards a greater control over presentational skills (spelling, handwriting, punctuation, etc.) Because the third stage of our interventions is not yet complete, we are not yet in a position to confirm or refute these tentative hypotheses; and we may generate some others.

Another intervention was aimed at sampling students' attitudes to writing. This involved asking a sample of 300 students to "Write about a writing task that either turned you off or turned you on". Teachers commented on the avidity with which students tackled the task and on the

surprising length of some pieces from "non-writers". We seem to have touched a nerve. One hundred of these scripts have been analysed. Most year 11 and year 12 students wrote 1 - 1.5 pages, tending to generalise about factors affecting writing, while the year 10 students split fairly evenly between generalising and commenting on a specific task, and seldom wrote more than one short paragraph.

Two categories are emerging as dominant in all years. One is the positive effect on students' attitudes of writing about topics that are self-chosen and involve strong interests, opinions and feelings. The other concerns constraints such as the class room atmosphere and distractions; time limits and deadlines; requirements of length; writing "on tap" without adequate stimulus and preparation; unsuitable, irrelevant and repetitious topics (especially Death and War) and teacher intolerance to student opinions. (This last was hotly disputed by the accused teachers!) Comprehension exercises seem, so far, to be the writing task most disliked by students and creative writing, particularly poetry, the kind they most enjoy and wish they had more of. However, not all students cherished freedom and creativity - some needed a specific task with teacher guidelines. Those who had had experience of stream of consciousness writing generally found this useful. Year 11 students, new to stylistic analysis, complained that this task spoiled their enjoyment of literature, but by year 12 students seemed to accept it. Other minor, but interesting, factors undermining student enjoyment of writing were lack of ideas, dearth of 'facts' (especially in year 10), good weather, the insecurity of not knowing what the teacher wants you to say, knowing what the teacher wants you to say and having to say it (again!), and the slowness of teachers in marking. Many students were "turned on" to writing by solitude and by being outside where they could commune with nature. In the 100 scripts analysed so far, two students saw writing as an aid to learning, two admitted to eventually enjoying writing tasks that they disliked starting, and one listed reader appreciation as an important motivation.

SURVEYS

1977 SURVEY

In order to fulfil the objective of describing the kinds of writing that go on in the senior years of Western Australian high schools, and hence to provide a broad context within which group or individual changes may occur, we have conducted two major surveys, one in 1977 and one in 1978. The 1977 survey has been analysed but the more complex 1978 survey still requires further analysis. The 1977 survey, conducted over two weeks (ten school days), attempted to sample the 'typical' writing of the 584 students in the sample group. We received 2011 samples of writing from 551 students' writing in all subjects. These samples were the products of writing tasks considered by the subject teacher to be 'typical' of class writing during the two weeks. Besides selecting the texts, subject teachers also completed a 'context sheet' which described the context in which the writing took place (e.g. whether the writing was done inside or outside the classroom, what led up to it, what the students were asked to do, whether there was a time limit or other special conditions which may have affected the writing). Most of the analysis of these scripts to date has been based on the 'function' categories devised by Britton and his co-workers, which classify writing according to the writer's concept of his role as 'transactional', 'expressive' or 'poetic'. The following table (Table I) compares our 1977 survey results with other similar surveys in England and Australia.

TABLE I

Comparison of Surveys of Writing Functions

(Expressed as percentages of all school writing that was sampled)

Survey	Transactional	Expressive	Poetic	Other
London (16-18 age group)	70.1%	4.3%	15.4%	10.2%
Tasmania (12-15 age group)	96.3%	0.9%	2.8%	0.0%
Education Dept. of W.A. (15-17 age group)	96.5%	2.9%	0.6%	0.0%
University of W.A. (15-17 age group)	86.9%	2.9%	9.2%	1.0%

It should be noted that there are some differences among the age groups and in the methods of sampling (e.g. we included mathematics writing because we found, surprisingly, that of the 206 mathematics scripts in our survey, 48 per cent consisted wholly or mainly of written sentences).

Because we were concerned to check our method of sampling (accepting subject teachers' notions of a 'typical' writing task in their subject) we ran another survey of kinds of writing over the same ten days, but this time students did the recording. Six students from year 10 and four from each of years 11 and 12 at each of the schools were asked to record (a) the time spent writing in class and (b) the types of writing they did over two weeks. These student recorders were chosen to represent a range of abilities and also for their assumed reliability in this task. Since students usually attempt the same writing task as others in the same class for about the same period of time, the 43 students who returned writing record booklets can be assumed to represent about one thousand students. For each day of the survey, the recorders noted, on a separate prepared sheet, the classes attended and the time spent writing in each subject. They also ticked the appropriate column for the type of writing done, having been previously briefed about the "types of writing" categories, which were kept simple to avoid confusion. Column headings for the types of writing were: (1) Copied notes from book, board or teacher; (2) Short answers to comprehension or tests; (3) More fully written report or summary in own words; (4) Essay based on facts; (5) Essay based on personal views; (6) Personal writing - your own experience, attitudes, feelings, imagination, e.g. diary, story, poem, play; (7) Other. Underlying our choice of categories was the assumption that they represent a continuum from perfunctoriness to engagement with the writing task, or impersonal/regurgitative to personal/creative. Although not strictly comparable, categories 1-4 include writing that might be called "transactional" in the London categories and categories 5-6 would probably correspond and overlap significantly with the "expressive/poetic" functions.

We found that, for the sample as a whole, the time spent writing in class as a percentage of the total class time averaged 44% in year 10 and 40% in each of years 11 and 12. "Writing" included most activity involving putting pen to paper, including mathematics exercises, but not drawing or mapping. In three of the four schools, the percentage of class time spent writing was less in year 11 than in year 10, but increased again in year 12. One tentative explanation for this somewhat surprising pattern was that with the introduction of new subjects into year 11 and the smaller classes, more discussion is possible. Another, more cynical, explanation was that year 10 writing, particularly of the project and worksheet kind, in a year (15 year olds) when discipline problems are often evident. may be at least partly used as a means of controlling classes./ In only one school was the percentage of time spent writing in class greater in year 12 than in the other two years; our theory that class writing time would increase as examinations approached was not verified, but the high proportion of class time spent writing in all three senior years should be emphasised and our mid-year survey did not test variations across terms 1, 2 and 3. The percentage of available class time spent in writing activities was generally lowest in English and highest in mathematics.

The types of writing recorded presented some provocative patterns. Perhaps the most striking of these was that the students at all four schools in years 10 to 12 spent <u>at least</u> two-thirds of their writing time in class copying notes and writing short answers of the kind usual in worksheets, exercises and tests. The amounts of time in categories 1 and 2 added together, ranged from 68% to 95% of the writing time in class with a mean of approximately 80%. That is, all students in years 10, 11 and 12 seem to spend about 80% of their writing time in class either copying notes or writing short answers to exercises of various kinds. The essay form and other forms of connected discourse are a minimal part of the in-school programme. Indeed, categories 3-6 accounted for only 17% of total writing time: report/summary in own words (category 3) averaged 8% of students' time;

essay based on facts (category 4) averaged 4%; and essay based on personal views (category 5) averaged 3%. No discernible pattern for categories 4-6 emerged across the different years or schools. In all but one school, personal writing (category 6), with a mean of only 2%, occurred even less in year 11 than it did in years 10 and 12.

As one would reasonably expect in a subject where writing is of special concern, English was the most important source of personal writing. That it was the *only* source of personal writing in the survey, perhaps bears some reflection. The fact that English is the subject in which the least writing activity in class seems to take place merely emphasises the point. English provided a greater variety of types of writing activity than any other subject and mathematics the least variety (almost all mathematics writing was in categories 1 and 2). Even in year 12, where a heavy emphasis on examination-oriented writing might be expected (even in mid-year, when our survey took place), students of English in all four schools experienced writing in all six categories.

We were left with some interesting speculations. Clearly, the teachers' perceptions as revealed by the scripts they considered to be "typical" often did not match the student records. The scripts collected by the teachers indicated more "personal" writing to be typical of their classes whereas student records for the same fortnight showed it to be exclusive to English. Conversely, note-taking assumed much greater importance in student records than in teachers' perceptions.

There were some marked variations within the overall patterns. As far as we could judge, these seemed to be due as much, if not more, to the influence of individual teachers than to any other single factor. Personal writing was a case in point - the students of one teacher in year 12 produced more than twice as much personal writing as all the other year 12 students in this subject put together. Any assumptions that we may have had about marked differences in writing behaviour between schools

due to socio-economic factors have not been borne out in the data collected so far. The influence of individual teachers seems to be emerging as a stronger factor than we had anticipated. But there is much data still to be analysed.

1978 SURVEY

Because we were uneasy about some aspects of our sampling and analysis in the survey described above, we conducted a second major survey in 1978, in which all in-school and out-of-school writing for a single week (including one weekend) was collected from 243 students. (Students were provided with pads and carbon paper and were asked to include all writing they did in the week - or, if it was too personal to include, to describe the kind of writing they had done.) In addition, kinds of writing (ranging from note-taking to personal writing as in the 1977 survey), time spent on writing, and kinds of associated classroom talk were recorded by 28 students selected for their reliability at this kind of task and representing a range of abilities. (These recorders represent about 550 students in the four schools).

The 1978 survey consisted of (a) the collection of pads of all the writing done at school over one week (including a weekend) by 243 students, and (b) the recording of writing and talk in class and writing at home, over the same period, by 28 students recorders.

An analysis of the pads showed that the proportions of total writing in the transactional, expressive and poetic categories in the 1978 survey are comparable with those in the 1977 survey (Table 1). The categorisation of scripts was considered complete when two members of the team agreed on the category; where there was doubt about this, a third member was consulted. Copied notes were classified as such by the students themselves in their writing pads and although we recorded these separately, they were finally included in the transactional category (as in 1977). When the categorisation was done, it was found

that copied notes comprised 30.4 percent of total writing and other transactional writing comprised 66.6 per cent, making a total of 97%. Expressive writing comprised only 1.9 per cent and poetic writing only 1.1 per cent of total writing. The decrease in the number of scripts in the 'poetic' category may be explained by the fact that this time the teachers did not select 'typical' scripts.

TALK AND WRITING

Our attempt to draw a broad picture of classroom talk drew on the student recorders' noting of all occasions on which classroom talk occurred for a period of 5 minutes or more, what kind of talk this was (see categories below) and the duration of such talk. The categories provided for kinds of classroom talk were:

T where the teacher does all or nearly all of the talking.

ST where students and teacher talk, but the students do most of the talking.

SG where students talk in small groups about a topic.

Students were asked to note the time spent in talk of these three kinds. Of the 36 student record booklets issued, 28 were successfully completed and returned. Assuming an average class size of 20, these records of talk and writing in class probably represent the experience of some 560 students in years 10, 11 and 12 in the four schools.

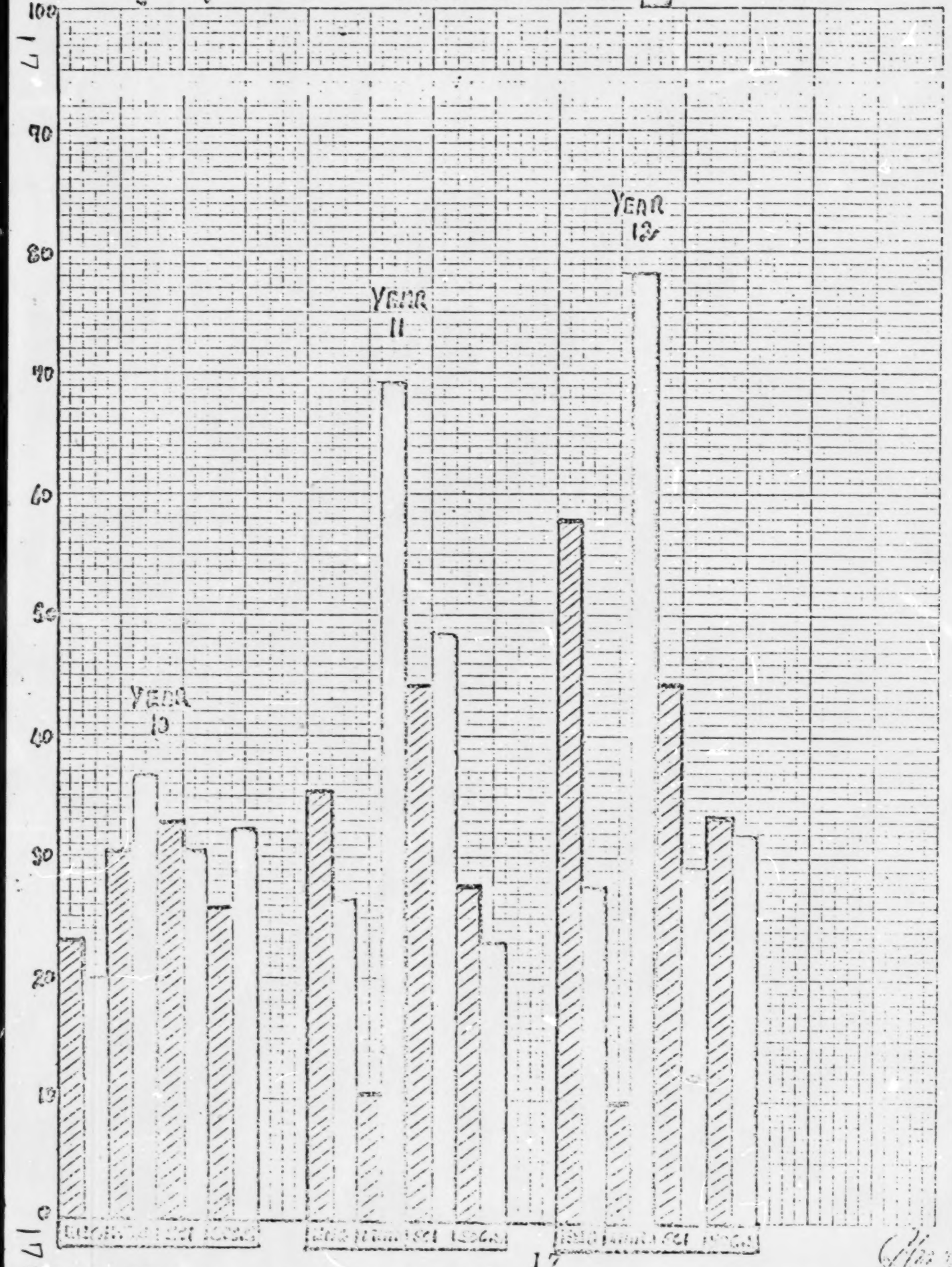
Table 2 shows talking and writing activity in relation to the total time spent in class in the four main subject areas in years 10, 11 and 12 in one school week. It should be noted that year 10 is bound to show lesser amounts than for the corresponding subjects in years 11 and 12, because the 'core' subjects in year 10 comprise a lesser proportion of the curriculum than they do in years 11 and 12. Another factor in the context which should be kept in mind when reading Table 2 (and Table 3) is that year 10 can be viewed as the end of a three-year sequence that began in year 8 rather than as part of a years 10-12 pattern. By year 11

% time available each major subject area.

TIME SPENT IN TALKING

TIME SPENT IN WRITING.

TABLE 2.



TIME SPENT IN CLASSROOM TALK AND WRITING AS PROPORTIONS OF TOTAL CLASS TIME

many students have left school: most of these who remain can be assumed to be oriented towards study, for pragmatic reasons if not for its own sake. Years 11 and 12 are generally accepted as constituting the upper school and it would probably be true to say that teaching the students in these years is seen by teachers to allow more scope for 'education' as the perceived need for discipline diminishes along with smaller numbers of students in each class. (A common response by case study students when asked about differences between year 10 and year 12 is that teachers have a different attitude to them, that they are beginning to be treated as 'adults'.)

Taking the sample as a whole, the amount of time spent in classroom talk was roughly the same in years 10 and 11 (28% and 25%) but increased to 36% in year 12. Teacher-dominated discussion (Category T) took up more of the discussion time in year 10, where it accounted for 79% of all talk, and year 11 (43%) but represented only 36% in year 12, where student/teacher interchange (Category ST) provided the highest figure of 47%. This latter category, in which students and teacher shared the discussion but the students did most of the talking, was 19.3% in year 10 but increased considerably to 36.8% in year 11, and increased again in year 12 to 46.5% of all class talk. Student group discussion was slight in year 10, accounting for only 2.5% of all time spent in discussion, but increased to 4.5% in year 11 and again to 8.3% in year 12. The overall tendency, then, was for teacher-dominated discussion to decrease considerably from year 10 to 11, and decrease again in year 12, while student/teacher interchange and student group discussion both increased. To put it another way, there was more discussion in year 12 than in years 10 and 11 and students participated more in that discussion.

The above description is modified somewhat by another measure of talk that we were able to obtain from the student record booklets - the frequency of occurrence of the three kinds of discussion. The data for

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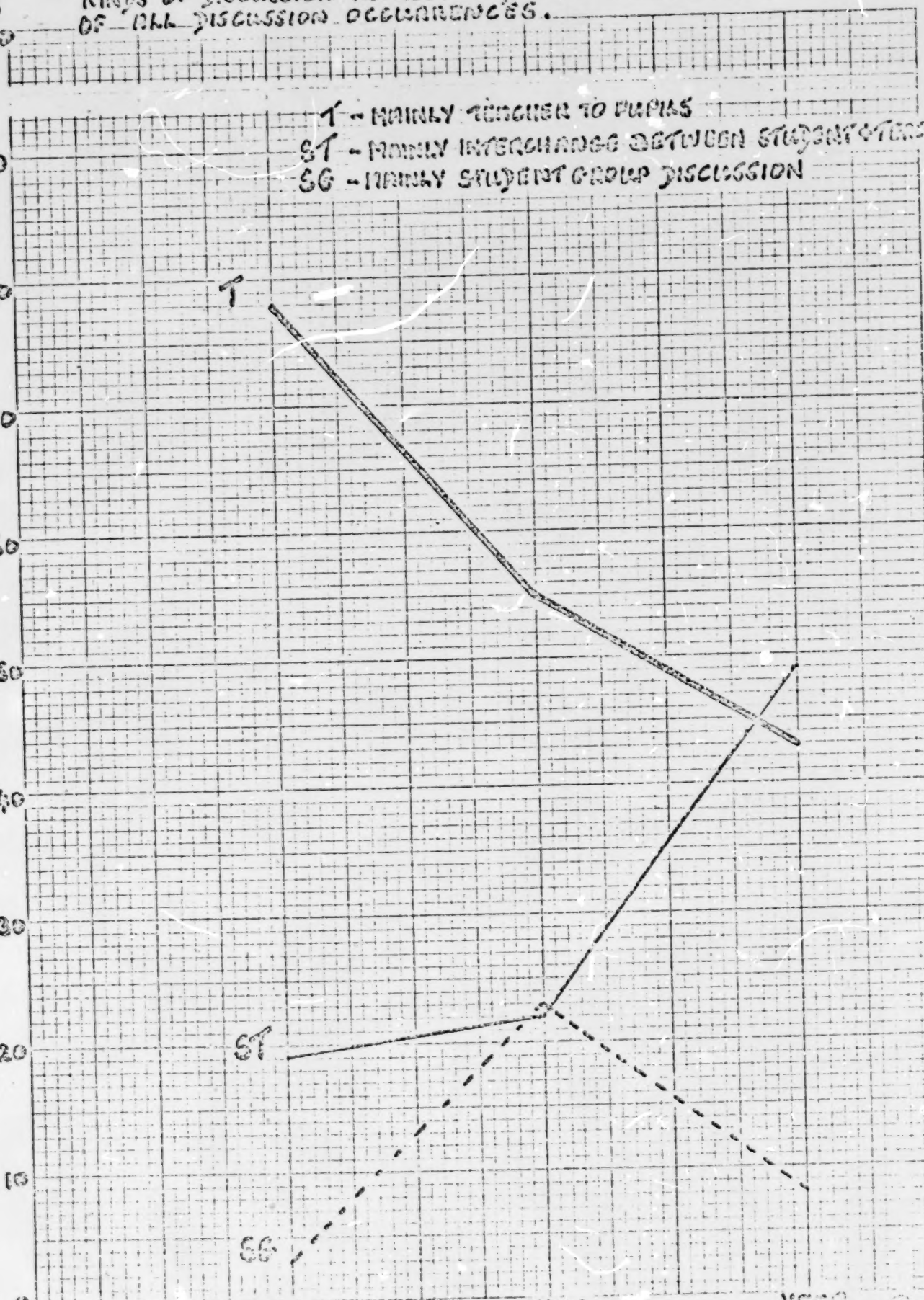
Table 3

FREQUENCY OF OCCURRENCE OF EACH OF THE THREE KINDS OF DISCUSSION REPRESENTED AS A PERCENTAGE OF ALL DISCUSSION OCCURRENCES.



for this was obtained by students noting each occasion on which discussion of one of the three kinds (T, ST or SG) occurred for a period of 5 minutes or more. Hence we obtained Table 3, which shows by means of a line graph the frequency of occurrence of each of the three kinds of discussion represented as a percentage of all discussion occurrences. It confirms the previous description in showing the way teacher-dominated discussion decreases from year 10 to year 11 to year 12, but modifies the previous description of amounts of time spent in different kinds of discussion by showing a dramatic increase in group discussion between year 10 and year 11. But the fact that there was a drop in frequency of occurrences, along with an increase in time spent in this kind of discussion in year 12 may simply mean that such group discussions occur less often, but for longer periods of time. // When we turn to subject differences, we find that, in terms of time spent in each year in each school, English had the lowest proportion of teacher-dominated discussion and the highest proportion of student/teacher interchange. In year 10 English also showed the greatest proportion of group discussion (indeed there was none in Mathematics and Science but in years 11 and 12 group discussion was highest in the Social Studies subjects). Teacher-dominated discussion was a feature of Science, which we noted earlier as the subject with the overall highest proportion of talk. Teacher-dominated talk was the most common kind of talk in years 10 (79%) and 11 (43%), but by year 12 the 36% of time spent in teacher-dominated talk had been replaced as the dominant category by student-teacher interchange (47%).

WRITTEN HOMEWORK AND 'PRIVATE' WRITING

Other important aspects of the 1978 'pads' survey included written homework and that area of writing that might be described as 'personal and private'. Taking written homework first, we found that the number of pages of homework written in one week, including a weekend, was slight in year 10

(1.5 pages per student per week) but increased to 4.8 pages in year 11 and 7.3 pages in year 12. The transactional category still dominated (97 per cent) but only 18 per cent of this was accounted for by copied notes (cf. 90.4% in class). The expressive and poetic categories were again slight (2.5 per cent and .002 per cent). In year 10 the average amount of writing was 9.8 pages at school and 1.5 pages at home; for year 11 it was 21 pages at school and 4.8 pages at home; for year 12 it was 21 pages at school and 7.3 pages at home. As we had expected, the older students did more writing at home than the younger students, but in year 12 written homework was still only one-third of the writing done in class. A check on this 'pads' survey of written homework, in which we compared the 28 student record sheets for the same week tended to confirm the above results, except that relatively more written work was done at home in year 11 than in other years. Our year 11 and year 12 recorders recorded 7.4 and 6.8 hours of homework per week, approximately double the 3.7 hours recorded by the year 10 recorders. Writing in the transactional category was again predominant, but, as in the analysis of the pads the amount of copied notes that might be described as part of the transactional category was far less at home than in class.

The investigator can never be sure that he is obtaining a full sample of students' personal and private writing which is, by definition, meant for the student's eyes alone. Nevertheless, in the pads of writing collected over one week (including a weekend) from 243 students we found that 27 students had included 66 pages of writing which they designated as 'private', or had left a note describing the kind and amount of private writing they had done. Of these, 15 pages were devoted to letter writing, 3 to diary entries, 2 to original poems, 3 to copied poems and 18 to a sort of explosive doodling which seemed to occur sometimes during bouts of homework but usually during school and included cartoons, abuse of various kinds and repeated exclamations such as 'I am going mad.' There were also 10 pages of hobby computer programming. Odds and ends included

were a recipe, a committee report, the lyrics for a song and a list of weekly activities interspersed with religious slogans. Twenty of the 27 students who included private writing (or a description of it) were girls and 10 of them (all girls) came from the country high school in our sample

As a check on these figures we have also analysed the descriptions by student recorders of their personal and private writing over the same week. The time spent in personal private writing by the 6 of the 28 recorders who engaged in it was 265 minutes, or an average of 44 minutes each. Over the whole group of 28 recorders, the average of time spent on personal private writing was 9.5 minutes. Not all of the nine occasions of personal writing was described, but they included two letters, one diary entry and a reminder note about the school tuck-shop.

QUESTIONNAIRES

Three separate questionnaires are under way for 1979. The first, which we are in the process of analysing, is designed to elicit teachers' perceptions of the writing process. It is intended to follow this up with a questionnaire that will elicit students' perceptions and attitudes, which can then be compared with those of the teachers. A third questionnaire is designed to elicit the points of view of parents on their children's writing.

The first of these, the questionnaire for teachers, was constructed with fairly open-ended questions and made provision for further comment where relevant. This format was adopted in an attempt to avoid the leading questions and restricted areas of response of the more formal questionnaire. We believe that the open-ended question can result in answers that are more truthful than those derived from selection of explicit alternatives, and that the difficulties inherent in processing teachers' own words can be turned to advantage. The impetus for such a format came primarily from the work of Barnes and Shemilt[6] and Bussis, Chittenden and Amarel.[7]

In order to devise the categories of questions, the member of the team responsible for devising the questionnaire (Chris Jeffery) and the Research Officer arranged a meeting with a group of teachers from outside the sample group and representing most of the 'core' subject areas - English, the social sciences, the biological sciences and mathematics. On the basis of this free-ranging discussion of the writing process (which was recorded and transcribed), five broad categories of concern were indentified:

(a) the kinds of writing students are asked to do.

(b) the aims of writing for both students and teachers.

(c) the contexts provided by teachers for writing to take place.

(d) teachers' impressions of writing at the various upper high school levels, i.e. years 10, 11 and 12.

(e) changes in writing which should occur across years 10 to 12.

Within these broad categories, teachers were asked to comment on specific areas of concern (up to six in each category) which, again, were derived from information elicited at the original meeting. In all categories an attempt was made to distinguish between

(a) what actually happens

(b) what should happen

(c) reasons for discrepancies between the actuality and the ideal.

The sample of 47 teachers who completed the questionnaire (there was a return rate of 85%) were from all subject areas (excluding mathematics) in years 10-12 in the four project schools.

Because only a preliminary analysis of the teachers' questionnaire has been completed, the following observations and comments must be viewed as tentative:

1. Perhaps the most recurrent theme to emerge from the teachers' comments is the negative attitude with which teachers view their students' writing. Writing is perceived almost universally as

as grammatically and structurally unsound, illogical, slapdash, lacking maturity ....., especially at the year 10 and 11 levels. Teachers' attitudes become slightly more positive towards writing at the year 12 level.

2. If students' writing is illogical, slapdash, etc., the fault lies with the students or, at best, with "the system". Teachers perceive their students' disappointing writing as resulting primarily from lack of student ability and motivation, and poor primary-school background. Very few teachers suggested that they themselves may be at least partially responsible - those that did were, with two exceptions, English teachers.

3. The pressures of the final external examination in year 12 and the syllabus to be covered were viewed by teachers as the main reasons for
   (a) the practices they adopt in the setting of writing tasks;
   (b) the writing tasks they ask their students to do.
   (These points are elaborated in 4 and 5 below.)

4. The most favoured stimuli for writing appear to be discussion (particularly by English teachers), research topics, experiments and verbal inducements ("this is for your own benefit"). Stimuli such as films, slides, excursions, role-play are used only occasionally. Overall, the main stimulation to write is the teacher's request.

5. In upper school classes, teachers tend to assign transactional writing - almost exclusively. Research topics, summaries, note-taking, copying from the blackboard, trial exam questions seem to pervade all subject areas with slightly more variety occuring within English.

6. In their students' writing, teachers look mainly for the knowledge about a subject that the writing reveals. Very little mention is made of any aspect of writing not related to knowledge about a subject, or about writing in relation to thinking, other than by English teachers.

7. When a writing task is completed it is usually graded. Occasionally it is exchanged with other students, read out or publicly displayed. Most teachers seem to perceive their role as markers and graders.

It would be quite inappropriate to generalize at this stage on the basis of such superficial analysis, other than to repeat the earlier comment on the negative views held by teachers towards student writing. The observations outlined above reveal little that is new, perhaps because at this stage they are only observations. However, a more detailed analysis of the data may raise further questions about teachers' perceptions of the writing process.

CASE STUDIES

An emphasis from the beginning of this research project on the importance of relatively intensive studies of the writing processes of a small number of students and their associated attitudes and feelings may be partly accounted for by the literary education shared by most members of the team. In Henry James's terms, the best writing is that which 'shows' rather than 'tells': we were concerned that our case studies should picture individuals and show the place that writing plays in their lives.

Recent support for a case study approach to education research has been heartening, for example, Stake (1978)[8]:

> 'Truth in the fields of human affairs is better approximated by statements that are rich with the sense of human encounter - with human encounter. To speak not of underlying attributes, objective observables and universal forces, but of perceptions and understanding, that come from a holistic regard for the phenomena.'

The analogy with literary production is made by Walker and McDonald[9]:

> 'Case study is the way of the artist who achieves greatness when, through the portrayal of a single instance locked in time and circumstance, he communicates enduring truths about the human condition.'

While science in its widest sense is not rejected, and various techniques of inspection of the data are recommended, it is interesting to find some researchers re-discovering Freud's case histories as models. McDonald and Walker, in the paper referred to above, quote Freud's comment on his own case studies:

> 'It still strikes me, myself, as strange that the case studies I write read like short stories and that as one might say, they lack the serious stamp of science.'

Yet case studies by Freud such as those of 'Little Hans' and 'Dora'[10] remain among the most powerful statements about repressed sexuality and the unconscious. The format of the 'Little Hans' piece is simple: (1) Introduction (17p.); (2) Case History and Analysis (74p.); (3) Discussion (43p.). In the case study of Little Hans Freud makes the following comment:

> 'We will begin by examining the material before us. It is not in the least our business to "understand" a case at once: this is only possible at a later stage, when we have received enough impressions of it.'

Although Freud does not always adhere to his own strictures, his case histories provide some encouragement and guidance to those of us who believe that behaviour cannot be effectively described by surface phenomena alone and that 'progressive focussing' is a valid approach.

As mentioned earlier ('The Sample', pp.7-8), case studies are a sub-set of the larger sample group and were selected so that an ability range was represented as well as some cases of both negative and positive attitudes to writing. It was intended that the criteria for initial selection of case studies should be only one aspect of that student's 'story': indeed, the criteria for selection of case studies were generally not known to the investigators and could not therefore prejudice their responses to these students.

Sixty students for case study analysis were chosen in 1977 from years 10,11 and 12, so that the length of acquaintance between investigators and their case studies has varied from one to three years. Obviously, the three-year acquaintanceship provides most opportunities for longitudinal analysis, but some of the studies over short periods have been quite fruitful in terms of the insights they have given into the writing process; and sometimes the information and samples of writing have spanned many years of the student's life. A natural rate of attrition would have reduced numbers from 60 to 28 in 1979, but other factors such as students leaving school earlier than expected to take up a job in a period of high unemployment, or members of the team withdrawing, have reduced the number of continuing case studies to 16 in 1979. This acceleration of our 'progressive focussing' is, in some respects, a blessing in disguise since the number of case studies taken on had been too great for some members of the team. Instead of regretting the apparent upset of a neat design, we will build this unexpected drop-out rate into our picture, which may be the more revealing because of it.

The main form of contact between investigators and case study students has been through interviews in the schools (at least one session of 40 minutes per term but usually more than this). The question of standardizing interview procedures arose early in the research but was rejected because it limited the directions in which the student's or the interviewer's interests might take the discussion. However, certain procedures were common to all interviewers. All interviews have been taped. Often, a full transcript of the interview is produced, but more commonly the interviewer writes a summary of each interview and relevant comments are transcribed under the following headings: physical context (e.g. places and circumstances where writing takes place and their apparent effects on writing), writing procedures, kinds of writing, teacher/student relations, audience, feelings and attitudes in relation to writing, reading

habits, television viewing habits, and speech in relation to writing. These areas are tentative and as we proceed with the interviews and weekly meetings of the investigating team, we introduce new areas of investigation or attention is focussed on particular areas of significance.

While establishing a general picture of the student we are also building up files containing samples of writing from different years along with teachers' comments. Some students have undertaken to tape or write their impressions of the process of writing. We have attempted (with mixed success) to simulate Emig's method of observing students composing aloud. Most have completed a sentence-joining exercise as a measure of syntactic maturity. A number of students have brought in personal, out-of-school writing ranging from diaries to complete novels. We are noting the effect on these students' writing of maturational and situational changes. Linguistic analysis of changes across time, situation, topic, genre, etc. is another avenue to be explored.

Much remains to be explored. In the meantime, different members of the team are writing up tentative case studies for publication among teachers and for use in workshops, discussion groups, etc. The first of these is 'Janet', a case study based on interviews over two years by Adrienne Walker. It runs to 44 pages in a small booklet, which is the format we intend to establish for this series. The second case study, not yet in booklet form, is 'Michael' by the present writer. A third, 'Adrian', by another member of the team, Andrew Sooby, is in preparation. No set form for these case studies has been required, but the assumption is that they should 'show' rather than 'tell'. We believe that, like the good story - and with appropriate recognition of the 'facts' - the appropriate form is that which best expresses its subject. Different emphases are inevitable. Hence, for instance, much weight is placed on Janet's interest in popular romance because it reveals so much of herself and her attitudes to writing; and Michael's role as an Aboriginal student

is stressed because this seems to reflect on his attitude to school and to writing.

The main check on rampant subjectsivism by the writer of a case study is discussion of the draft profile among members of the team and teachers. However, we recently experimented with another kind of check when one member of the team (Simon McPhail) joined Janet, a girl friend of hers (another case study student) and the regular interviewer of Janet, Adrienne Walker, for drinks and an informal (but taped) discussion about Janet's writing. This new element jolted what had become a rather comfortable and intimate series of discussions and challenged a number of previously accepted notions. Simon McPhail is writing an alternative study of Janet by comparing Janet and her friend as writers. His approach and his perceptions will be different, but our view of Janet as a person and a writer will be enhanced.

CONCLUSION

We have not arrived there yet.

However, a detailed description of kinds of writing in the last three years of schooling in four high schools in Western Australia is emerging. This description, which draws on two extensive surveys and a questionnaire, will provide the broad context within which individual case studies may be viewed.

A variety of techniques is being used to identify and describe changes that occur in students' writing during the last three years of secondary schooling. The factors underlying these changes are elusive, but our experience with case studies convinces us that the sources of such change must be sought both in the contexts provided for writing and in the individual students themselves. Key factors appear to be the individual student's intentions and motives in writing. In attempting to categorise scripts according to the 'audience' categories of Britton et al., we became acutely aware of the limitations of speculating from the end products alone: we needed to know more about the individual writer and his intentions. If we are to develop Britton's model of the writing process it will probably be in the direction of a more complex and realistic model that takes account of motive and intentionality. In addition, the research contains possibilities of extending our knowledge of the relationship between writing and reading and between writing and talk.

The descriptive context was necessary to establish our perspectives, but if there are answers to the question of why changes occur in writing they will lie in the case study work. It is in this aspect of the research that we come closest to the writer's intentions and perceptions. With all its potential dangers of idiosyncrasy and bias the case study may, after all, come closest to the "truth" of the matter.

NOTES

1. See Stubbs, M and Delamont, S., *Explorations in Classroom Observation* (John Wiley and Sons, London, 1976), pp. 11-14.

2. Britton, J., Burgess, T., Martin, N., McLeod, A., and Rosen, H. *The Development of Writing Abilities 11 to 18* (MacMillan, London, 1975)

3. Emig, J., *The Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders* (N.C.T.E. Research Report no. 13, Urbana, 1971).

4. Cooper, Charles and Odell, Lee. 'Considerations of Sound in the Composing Process of Published Writers,' *Research in the Teaching of English*, vol. 10, no. 2, 1976, pp. 103-115.

5. Graves, Donald. 'An Examination of the Writing Processes of Seven Year Old Children', *Research in the Teaching of English*, vol. 9, no. 3, 1975, pp. 228-241.

6. Barnes, D. and Shemilt, D. 'Transmission and Interpretation,' *Educational Review*, vol. 16, no.3.

7. Bussis, A., Chittenden, E. and Amarel, M. *Beyond Surface Curriculum* (Westview Press, Boulder, 1976).

8. Stake, R.E. 'The Case Study Method in Social Inquiry,' *Educational Researcher*, 5-8 February, 1978.

9. Walker, R. and MacDonald, B. 'Case Study and the Social Philosophy of Educational Research' paper presented by Rob Walker to a conference of professional evaluators convened by the Schools Council at the West Midland College of Education, Walsall, in September, 1974.

10. See *Sigmund Freud 8*, Case Histories 1:'Dora' and 'Little Hans', *The Pelican Freud Library*, ed. Angela Richards (Harmondsworth, 1977).

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